

Ghost of the Night Fury

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Summary: Eleven years after killing a Night Fury, Hiccup learns its secrets.

Ghost of the Night Fury

Eleven years ago, I killed a Night Fury.

I harbor this secret, that I am the only Viking to have ever killed one. Though I did not kill it with my own hands, I built and used the weapon that brought it down many years ago, with me as the only witness.

I found the dragon in the woods where it had fallen. I raised the blade above my head but could not bring myself to lower it. I cut free the Night Fury, knowing that in doing so, I was throwing away everything my father wanted of me and everything I thought I wanted of myself. I sat with the dragon as it lay dying from its wounds. I watched it die.

There have been no Night Furies on Berk since. I do not know if anyone who heard me claim I hit a Night Fury that night ever put the disappearance of the dragon and my statement together. I dare not ask for fear of what might happen if someone were to find out.

That night has haunted me ever since. It is my biggest failure as a Viking. My father put me in dragon training the very next day, though I only made it through five sessions before Gobber decided I was too much of a danger to myself and to the others and sent me back to the forge. For the first time, though, I was glad to be there instead of out fighting dragons.

But something changed me that night. It has taken me until only recently to realize what that was, but I have it now. When I looked the Night Fury in the eye, I saw something I was not expecting to see.

Intelligence.

That dragon knew I had shot it down and knew I had come to kill it. It knew it was too injured to fight and so, it gave up and resigned itself to its fate. And when I cut it loose, I could see the gratitude in its eyes, but also regret, and fear. For what, I do not know.

Like all Vikings, I believed dragons were simple creatures that raided us for food, much like a hawk hunts for mice in a field. I believe now that there is something more to dragons than what we know, and there is more to why the Night Fury never showed itself and never stole our food, but still fought alongside the other dragons. I have made it my mission to find out why.

Tonight, I set out on a journey that I hope will help me answer those questions. I left a note on my bed for my father, explaining where I have gone. I do not tell him the full reason why I am leaving, only that I want to know why the dragons once attacked Berk and why they have now left.

Eight years after the Night Fury died, every dragon stopped raiding our village. We know that the dragons are not gone. We see them occasionally nearby, although they avoid coming to Berk. Vikings here are still hostile towards them, fearful of another attack, even though it has been three years since the last one.

I believe that the reason the Vikings left is tied with why the Night Fury never joined them in raids. It is connected with why the dragons raided us in the first place, for I know something about the dragons that I believe no other Viking does. After years of watching dragons in secret, I discovered something unexpected: the dragons never eat the sheep and livestock they steal. They only eat fish.

I did not come to this conclusion on my own. Since that night eleven years ago, I have seen the Night Fury's ghost out of the corner of my eye. I hear its wail during storms. I have followed the dragon's shadow across Berk, and it has led me to dragons eating nothing but fish, many times over again. It is trying to show me something. Tonight I will begin to find out what.

I pack a few weeks' worth of provisions into one of our boats. It is not a warship, but it is seaworthy enough to help me travel and it will not be missed. I leave before the sun rises in the early hours of the morning, when no other Vikings are awake to ask where I am going.

As the boat moves out into open water, I look west towards Hellhound's Gate. It has long been my father's belief that the dragons' nest lies within the tangle of rocks that have caused many a ship to be broken against the crags that stick out of the water in an unearthly fog. I have other reasons to believe the answers we have long searched for and the ones I now seek lie within.

When a storm rises on Berk and the gods send us thunder and lightning, I hear the Night Fury call out. Every Viking on Berk knows the cry of the offspring of lightning and death itself. Once, years ago, I would ask anyone who would listen if they, too, heard the Night Fury in the rage of the storm. But none ever have. Only I can

hear the Night Fury now.

I began to watch outside during every thunderstorm that hit Berk. And one night, not long after the Night Fury died, I thought I saw its shadow flying west. Its wail faded in that direction. As it disappeared, I saw a flash of light among the rain-darkened sky. To anyone else, it looked like normal lightning. But to me, it had the distinctive purple light that has always belonged to the Night Fury's fire.

In every storm that has come to Berk since I have seen signs of the Night Fury's ghost. I look for it now, and it has appeared to me every time. For years I have yearned to follow it, because I believe the dragon wants to show me something, even after it has passed from this world and only its ghost remains. Today, I finally can.

The sun has now risen enough that I can see my hands in front of me. I turn to watch Berk behind me, getting smaller as the boat moves westward. I imagine that my father is waking up. He has always been an early riser. He is discovering my note now, I picture in my head, and he turns to look westward, his eyes seeing not the walls of my house but instead the horizon towards which I sail. I do not think he will follow unless I do not return within the three weeks I wrote in my letter. It has been years since anyone on Berk has been attacked by a dragon, and years even longer that my father has been urging me to fight or quest or do something other than stay in the forge or wander off into the woods for long hours. I am a man of twenty-four now, and though still small compared to the other Vikings, I can hold my own with a sword and am no longer the weak boy I once was. I think he will be happy that I am going out on my own.

Suddenly, something flies close enough over my head that its wind ruffles my hair. I turn my head to follow it west. It is as I expected, a black shape in the dawning light, heading west. I rush to open my map and my thoughts are confirmed. The Night Fury's ghost is flying in the same direction as Hellhound's Gate. I smile to myself. Whatever the Night Fury's mission is, I am following it.

With only me manning the small boat, it takes nearly the entire day for me to arrive at Hellhound's Gate. I tie the boat to a rock on the outskirts of the cluster. The mass of broken rocks looms in front of me, shrouded by the ever-present fog the stories have always told about. I look up at it in the dying sunlight. Within the haze, I hear the shrieks of dragons and the beat of their wings. It strikes me for a moment how deranged I must be, following a dragon's ghost that may not even be real into a maze of rocks that master sailors have failed to navigate. How could I ever manage to find my way through there on my own? Why am I following what could be just the delusions of guilt from a deed long past?

It is too late to turn back now. The sun has set, and I dare not sail my way back to Berk, not after I have been awake for more than fifteen hours. I lay on my bedroll on the floor of the boat, but I do not close my eyes. I cannot sleep tonight and so I stare up at the sky as the stars come out and the moon rises, casting a bluish light over everything around me.

What will I discover at the center of Hellhound's Gate? Will I find more rocks, covered in dragons? Or an island, also covered in dragons? I have no doubt there will be dragons. I only hope that I do

not have to fight one.

Eventually, my eyes close and I fall asleep, and when I do, I dream of the Night Fury.

It is not the night I killed the dragon, like I often dreamed years ago. No, instead I am riding on the back of it. I am a boy still, not much older than I was that night. Together, the Night Fury and I fly through rock formations I have seen in the water around Berk. The dragon wears a saddle and I am sitting on it.

We fly for what feels like hours together, performing incredible tricks in the air that seem impossible, but yet we do them anyway. We fly until the light fades from the sky, and suddenly the dragon tenses and the plates on the back of its head shake gently, quivering with an audible rattle. The dragon turns sharply, heading west, and I let it go its way. I trust it to make sure I am not harmed.

We approach Hellhound's Gate from the sky and suddenly the air is filled with dragons, each carrying livestock of some sort. There must have been another raid tonight. I lean down on the Night Fury's back to avoid being noticed, but no dragon pays attention to me. We dive out of the air and into the fog that surrounds the rocks. The Night Fury leads me through them and the air opens up to reveal an island ringed with fog. I look up as we fly towards it and see that this is no ordinary island; it is a volcano. Only then do I register that what I thought was fog has turned to smoke.

The Night Fury follows a stream of dragons around the side of the island to a hole several dozen meters up the volcano's side. We wind through a passage of heat and smoke to the center of the volcano. From within glows a harsh red light and the air is filled with thickening smoke. I see the tunnel widen in front of me, and as we fly into the volcano's core, the dream ends. I open my eyes and find that it is morning. The ocean spray has covered me with a damp coolness that doesn't quite wash away the sensation of heat on my face that I felt in my dream.

Was it real? Of course it wasn't. I never rode on the back of a dragon when I was boy, and I of all people would know that there are no more Night Furies on Berk for me to ride. Was this instead what could have happened had the Night Fury lived? Could the two of us have become friends, enough that we would spend hours together flying in the sky, enough that the Night Fury would let me ride on its back, enough that it would show me the secret of the dragons' nest? Suddenly I am filled with a longing for what could have been, although I know it could never happen in reality. A Viking, riding on the back of a dragon? Me, riding on the back of a Night Fury? It is impossible to imagine.

My doubt from last night is gone. This dream makes it clear to me that the Night Fury is trying to show me something. In the center of that island, in the heart of a volcano, there is something important enough that a dragon is trying to show me what it is. I pack up my bedroll and untie the boat from the rock. With a deep breath, I turn the boat into the haze.

The waves move my boat gently in the fog. All is still around me. For a moment, I think that this will not be so difficult, and then a rock sticking out of the water comes looming out of the mist. I push the

tiller sharply and the boat turns, running into the rock anyway. The wood where the rock hit is cracked, but thankfully the integrity of the boat remains. I grip the tiller tightly. I ask myself again why I have taken on this mission. No Viking has ever made it to the center of Hellhound's Gate. But no Viking has ever killed a Night Fury, either. Except me.

As if on cue with my thoughts, I hear a noise out of the murk. It is the same one I heard in my dream as the Night Fury flew to Hellhound's Gate, a gentle rattle. It echoes faintly in the rocks, but it is clearly coming from one direction. I lean on the tiller and the boat turns left, towards the sound. It gets louder as the boat moves forward, until it suddenly is coming from my right. I quickly turn the tiller again, narrowly avoiding another rock I did not see. The Night Fury's ghost is guiding me through the maze.

For the next several hours, I follow the sound of the dragon through the twist of rocks. Eventually, everything quiets and my boat runs ashore on a beach made of gray stones. I look up, and the volcano above me is the same as the one in my dream.

I pull my boat up onto the shore so that it cannot be washed away. It takes me a moment to orient myself, viewing the volcano from the ground instead of the air, but I soon recognize where I need to go. I gather a sack with enough food for several days, since I do not know how long this journey will take. I strap my sword to its sheath on my back, something I designed to limit the noise it makes as I walk. It is helpful for observing dragons without scaring them away. I hope I do not need it, but I do not know what I will find inside the volcano.

I stand on the shore of the volcano, praying to the gods that I am doing the right thing. Doubt strikes me again, and I wonder for the first time if the Night Fury is trying to trick me into entering the volcano, where I will meet my death. But I smell no smoke in the air, and the rational side of me says that this volcano is likely extinct. I take a breath and begin my walk to the far side of the island.

The walk around to where I saw the hole in my dream takes me along an increasingly narrow beach. I come to a point where I can no longer safely stay on the ground. I will have to climb the side of the volcano to the hole, which I can just see if I crane my head far back enough. I send a silent thanks to whatever god encouraged me to learn one of Gobber's other lessons, rock climbing. It is useful for climbing some of the hills on Berk to watch dragons, and I see it will come in handy today.

I begin the climb to the hole in the rocks. It is steep, but I have climbed steeper and years of practice allow me to see a clear path to take me to my destination.

By the time I arrive, I am sweating heavily. I pull myself onto the ledge and crawl back a few feet before leaning against the wall of the tunnel. I wipe my brow with my shirt and suck in a deep breath. I consider continuing on, but it would be foolish of me to move forward without a break. There is no light or heat coming from the end of the cave, like in my dream, only darkness. There is something foreboding about the blackness and the smell coming from it does not make me eager to continue. I take out some bread and a flask of watered down wine and rest my head on the cave wall.

It is not long after I close my eyes that I feel something arrive in the tunnel with me. It is a swoop of wind that blows against my face and dries some of the sweat. I know it is the Night Fury's ghost. I feel it watching me, and although I know cannot see it, I know it is there, just a few feet away. It does not seem impatient. It has waited eleven years for today. It knows I will follow it.

I open my eyes and slowly take a drink from my flask. I do not move my gaze from the spot where I feel the Night Fury sits. I do not know what to say. What do you say to the ghost of the dragon you regret killing over a decade ago? I say nothing.

After a few minutes, I regain my breath and am rested enough to continue, down into the cold heart of the volcano. I pull a torch out of my bag and light it. The firelight flickers off the rocks. The side of the tunnel slopes steeply and I keep my hand on the wall for balance.

I reach the end of the tunnel where the rock face drops off in a precipice. There is still no heat coming from the dead volcano, for which I am grateful. The air smells worse here than it did on the outside, a musty smell with something sour behind it. It is dusty too. I pull my shirt over my nose so that I can breathe better. The light from the crater above does very little to help me see what's in front of and below me. I step back and rummage in my bag for some extra torch fuel. I light it and drop it into the abyss below me.

The small light drops into the pit below me. To my relief, it lights shelves of rock on the walls, covered in dried dragon droppings. I lay on my stomach and inch over the edge to see beyond the shelf below me. Faintly, I can see the light I dropped glowing on what I hope is the bottom of the pit. The dull light illuminates strange shapes sticking out of the ground. Nothing moves below, but I notice that above me, dragons are shifting about on their perches near the opening. They know I am here.

Suddenly, I hear something, a dragon, breathing behind me, standing over my shoulder, looking down in the abyss with me. Tense, I turn my head slowly to look. My torchlight bounces off the cave walls. I can see nothing, but as before, I know the Night Fury's ghost is watching me.

Taking a deep breath without breathing in the musty air, I move about and drop to the rock shelf a few feet below me. There are more rock shelves sticking out of the walls of the volcano. I choose the closest one to my shelf and jump down to it.

I continue on this way for another hour, stopping occasionally to readjust my shirt over my face or take another drink of wine. As a climb down, the shapes I saw earlier become more pronounced, casting shadows in the cave and the dusty air. I reach the cave floor and sigh with relief. I have made it.

I wait for a sign from the Night Fury, but nothing comes. I hold my torch out in front of me and walk towards the center of the volcano. My footsteps kick up dust that swirls around me before settling. There is no wind here.

I pass into the shapes I saw from above. They stick out dozens of feet into the air, dark gray, coated in dust, fading into the air above me. I wander in between, gazing all around at them. Is this what the Night Fury wants me to see? I believe this is part of it, but strange shapes in the darkness seem too unimportant for this to be everything I need to know.

I wander into the center of the floor, the crater's light directly above my head. Something moves in the air above me, the first sign of movement I've felt down here. I look up and realize that the shapes have changed as I've walked around. I now look through six holes in a symmetrical pattern, and I realize what the shapes around me are. They are the skeleton of a giant dragon. I am standing beneath its skull.

I have read about these dragons in lore. Very few people believe they are real, or if they once were, that most are gone now. This one has been dead for several years, it seems. I would imagine three years, to be exact.

I wave my torch around, trying to get a better view of the massive skeleton. This is proof that these dragons are real, or were, at least. I long to take notes in my journal, but I remind myself of my mission here. The Night Fury has led me here for a reason. I need to know what that is.

"Is this what you want me to see?" I call out. My voice seems muffled in the dust "€" which I now realize is ash "€" and barely echoes back to me. It fades. Nothing else responds.

"Why did you bring me here?" My voice grows louder as I ask more questions. "What is it that you need me to know? You want me to see something! What is it? What am I supposed to do?"

"Why are you haunting me? What can I do to help you? What can I do?" I fall to my knees, sending swirls of ash into the air. "I'm sorry for that night! I'm sorry that you died because of me. I regret it every day that I live. I never thought about what would happen if I actually shot you down. If I could go back and do it all over again, I wouldn't! I wouldn't pull the trigger or bring down the blade. I would refuse! Vikings shouldn't be killing dragons! I never should have killed you!"

I place my head in my hands, dropping the torch to the ground. "I'm sorry," I whisper. "We could have learned so much."

There is no response. I sit in the silence and the dust settles around and on me. After a moment, I open my eyes and look around. I see nothing moving except the few trails of dust and ash that remain in the air. I sigh and reach down to collect my torch, which is dimmer now because of the ash I dropped it in.

As I do, the firelight glints off something some ten feet in front of me. I gather the torch and walk over to find out what I am seeing. It's a stone slightly larger than my hand. I pick it up and turn it over. Unlike the ground on which I found it, the stone is not covered in ash. It is smooth to the touch and shade of bright green. It reminds me of the Night Fury's eyes. I break my gaze from it and look around. "This is what you want me to see, isn't it?" I ask.

The Night Fury does not respond. Everything is quiet and still, but I suddenly feel as though my mission here is through. I look around one final time. The dragon's skeleton stands around me, unmoving. I stick the stone in my pocket and head towards the hole in the cave wall.

The climb out is long, and the climb down from the outside is even longer. It is dark by the time I make it back to my boat on the rocky shore. I will have to spend the night on this island. It would be suicide to try and maneuver through the rocks at night, even with the Night Fury guiding me. I have not seen sign of the dragon's ghost in hours, not since I felt it looking over my shoulder on the ledge in the volcano's core.

I do not like the idea of spending the night on an island covered in dragons, but I have no choice. Since I stepped foot on this island, I have not felt threatened by a dragon in the least, but twenty-four years of ingrained fear are hard to break in a single night. I build a small fire on the rocks next to the boat with fuel I brought with me. There are no trees here. I choose to sleep inside the boat tonight, but I light a fire anyway. Fire does not scare dragons away, but it will bring me light and comfort.

I sit down next to the fire and lean against the boat. I pull the stone out of my pocket and turn it over in my hands. It glistens in the firelight and I wonder why the Night Fury felt it was important for me to find this.

I hear the flap of wings to my left, and I look towards the sound, expecting to see nothing but rock walls in the distance. Instead, I jump in my seat and drop the stone onto the rocks below me. It was not the Night Fury's ghost that made the noise this time, but a Zippleback that came to investigate. It is young, because it is barely longer than I am tall. Its two heads start to sniff at me. I do not yet reach for my sword. I shrink back against the boat, unsure of how to react to a dragon this close to me. The last time I was face to face with a dragon was eleven years ago.

"Uh...hi," I say uncertainly. "Could you please...not get so close to me?"

To my surprise, the Zippleback backs away and sits down on the other side of the fire. It doesn't seem like it wants to hurt me. It seems curious. I am still wary, though, as I slowly reach down and pick up the dropped stone. I keep my eyes on the dragon.

The two heads follow my hand's movement. As soon as I touch the stone, the Zippleback cries out and lunges at me across the fire, sparks forming in one of its mouths. "No! Stop!" I shout.

The Zippleback freezes, a small cloud of green haze surrounding the two heads. I stare up at it, breathing heavily. Why would the Zippleback react like that to me touching the stone? Why would it stop so suddenly when I cried out? I risk a look at the stone. Nothing has changed. I look back up at the Zippleback, which has remained still, watching me.

"Sit down," I venture, an idea growing in my head. The Zippleback obeys and sits down. "Stand up." The Zippleback stands. I tell it to walk in a circle and sit down and stand a few more times. Every

command, it obeys.

Can this stone really do what I think it is doing? Can it really control the dragons? I set the stone down and pull my hand away from it. The Zippleback visibly relaxes and moves away from the fire. It takes a few steps and flies off.

I stare at the stone, the orange of the fire combining with the stone's green color to make it seem as though it is glowing. I suspect that what I think is true. I believe that this stone can control the dragons. I lean my back on the boat and cross my arms. Thinking about what just happened and the dream I had last night, I come to what I believe is how all of this comes together, and why the Night Fury brought me here.

The giant dragon that lived in the volcano possessed this stone. For the last three hundred years, it has been controlling the other dragons, making them bring it food that it stole from the Vikings. That would explain why I have never seen dragons eating anything but fish. They bring the sheep and cows and whatever else they find to the giant dragon and it eats what they bring.

But how does the Night Fury play into all this? In all our history on Berk, no Viking has ever seen a Night Fury steal food. Could the Night Fury be immune to this stone? As I think about it more, that seems to be the most likely answer. The Night Fury, maybe all Night Furies, is immune to this stone's effects. And maybe the reason it never stole food but would still destroy parts of our village was because it was trying to help the other dragons. I cannot come up with a reason why, but I feel confident that I am right. I still have one last question that I cannot answer, though.

I look up at the dark sky. The fog here is ever present and I cannot see the moon that was so bright the night before. "You wanted me to find this stone," I whisper to the night. "Why? Why is this so important to you that I find it and know what it can do? If the other Vikings find it and learn its secrets, they will use it."

As I speak those words, a shadow appears in the corner of my eye, well beyond the fire. I do not turn my head, for I know that there will be nothing there for me to see. But the Night Fury's ghost is watching me.

I think about the dream I had last night where I was riding saddle-back on the Night Fury. I remember the feeling of union I had with it as we flew through the air, and the trust I had in it when it took me to this island. I trusted it to keep me alive even in the most dangerous place a Viking could ever be.

Could the Night Fury feel that same trust in me? Does it trust me enough to share with me the secret of this stone? Does it think that I will not use the stone against the dragons? It startles me to realize that is true. I would never use this stone against the dragons. They are at least as smart as humans are. And no creature deserves to be enslaved against its will to the whims of a more powerful beast.

"You wanted me to find this stone," I say, louder this time, "so that I can make sure no other dragon or Viking uses this again. You wanted me to make sure the dragons remain free to their own wills. That's

it, isn't it?"

The Night Fury does not respond, but something settles over my little campsite, a feeling of satisfaction and relief. I am right, I think. That is why the Night Fury brought me here. It wants me to protect this stone's secret and make sure it is not used to ever force a dragon into subservience again.

I look around at the air outside the campfire and realize with a start that as I've been thinking, dozens of dragons have gathered around. They are all watching me, but I do not feel afraid. They trust me and I trust them.

"I promise, to all the dragons." I pause before speaking again. "I promise to the Night Fury Iâ€|killed, eleven years ago, that I will protect this stone and its secrets with my life. I promise that I will make sure no Viking or dragon uses it against you." I lower my eyes so that I do not see the dragons watching me. But then I raise them again. I must face the past. "I owe all of you that much after what I, and the Vikings of Berk, have done to you."

The dragons do not react immediately. They sit there and stare at me, but it is not an uncomfortable stare. Then, one by one, the dragons lie down and curl up. I wait until they have all settled and I feel certain most of them are asleep. I climb into the boat and lay on my bedroll. In no time at all, I am asleep as well, protected by a circle of dragons. I do not dream.

When I wake up, the dragons are gone and my fire is out. I gather up everything I brought out the night before, including the stone. I am careful not to touch it with my skin. I wrap it in a spare shirt and set it at the bottom of my bag. I take one last look at the island, thinking about what happened here last night. Something incredible, something amazing, happened last night. I am not sure what will happen next, but I realize now we have a lot to learn about dragons. Everything we know about them is wrong. They are not thoughtless predators and killers like we have always thought.

I push the boat off into the water and jump aboard. The Night Fury does not lead me through the maze of rocks, but somehow I avoid damaging the boat beyond repair.

I reach the outer rocks that are outside the cloud of fog that always coats Hellhound's Gate. I smile at the irony. There is nothing hellish about this place now.

My smile fades, though, as I look to the northwest. A storm is brewing on the horizon and is moving closer. I do not wish to be caught in it, not in such a small boat in the middle of the sea. This boat and I wouldn't stand a chance. At the same time, I fear tying my boat up to one of the outlying rocks. Surely the boat would be smashed against one of them and I would drown. I dare not try to make it back to the island. I do not know if my luck â€" or help â€" would hold a third time traveling through, and if the storm arrives before I make it to the island, my boat would also be destroyed amidst the rocks. The only chance I see is to sail towards Berk and hope to arrive before the storm does. There is a strong wind blowing that way. Steeling myself for what might come, I adjust the sails to take me home.

Within an hour, though, my hopes of making it to Berk before the storm hits are dashed. The storm is closer now than it was at Hellhound's Gate. I stow the bag with my food and the stone in an oilcloth and tie it under one of the seats in the hopes that they will remain dry when the storm comes. I have no doubt it will, and I am soon proven right.

Within minutes, I am drenched from the rain. It washes off the dust and ash that still linger from the inside of the volcano. Thunder is loud in my ear and lightning strikes the water around me. I pray it ignores my boat. I hold tightly to the tiller, although turning it does no good. The wind rocks the boat back and forth and it takes all my strength to not fall out. It strikes me how absurd it would be to have ventured in and out of the center of Hellhound's Gate and spent a night surrounded by dragons and emerged unscathed, only to die in a storm while returning home. For the first time in my life, I am genuinely terrified that my life is going to end. I do not believe that I will make it through the storm. I give up trying to steer the boat and focus on praying and not letting go.

The boat rocks violently, and suddenly, the wind dies a bit and the ocean calms. I open my eyes to see if the storm is ending. The rain has not let up and there is still thunder, but the seas are calmer. A bolt of lightning flashes as soon as my eyes are open, close enough to make to hair on the backs of my arms and neck stand up. It is more purple than the other bolts, and standing in the boat in front of me is the Night Fury.

It looks exactly like it did that night eleven years ago, when it died in front of me, except for one thing. Its eyes are not slits like they were then. Tonight they are squared and rounded at the edges. Those green eyes almost seem to glow in the gloom of the storm. They are full of a mix of emotions: sadness, pain, relief. And gratitude. The Night Fury is not as terrifying as the legends claim.

Entranced, I risk letting go of the tiller with one hand. I reach out towards the Night Fury. I do not break eye contact with the dragon. It seems as solid as it was the night I watched it die. My fingers just barely touch the Night Fury on the space between its eyes. I can feel the cool texture of its scales on my hand. Lightning flashes again, that same purple, and by the time the flash fades from my eyes, the Night Fury's ghost is gone.

I stand there in the rain as it dies down and the storm abates. It is not much later when the rain is gone completely. I can see Berk in the distance, waiting for me. The sun has not yet set, although it will by the time I arrive home.

Home. It seems impossible now that I could have survived that storm. I think of the Night Fury, the offspring of lightning and death itself, the legends say, and I believe that the dragon's ghost led me through the storm so that I could make it home to Berk.

My boat continues to sail towards the island. I think about everything that happened over the past two days, and everything that happened in the past eleven years. I killed a Night Fury, and not a single day has gone by that I do not regret it. I am no killer, and that dragon did not deserve to die. No dragon " or Viking " does, not for doing something beyond its control.

Why did the Night Fury trust me to guard the secret of the stone? I was the one who killed it, after all. I took from this world the life of one of the most feared dragons, and with it the chance for me learn from it. What I saw in that dragon's eyes those eleven years ago and I saw in that dream showed me that there is so much we can learn about dragons and so much we can change about their and our lives. If we could stop for one second and try to change our minds about dragons, so much could change for the better.

Perhaps the Night Fury saw in me something that made it change its mind about Vikings. It certainly saw something that made it trust me with what I believe is the dragons' biggest secret, a stone that can control them. What that something is, I do not know and I do not presume to know.

Whatever that is, I am grateful. Despite my mistake, despite the Night Fury's death, I have learned so much that no Viking has ever cared to try to learn. I know so much now about dragons and I see them for what they are: intelligent creatures that are more than just mindless killers.

I carry two secrets now. I carry my own, that I killed a Night Fury eleven years ago. And now, I carry the Night Fury's secret as well. I alone, of all the Vikings, know why the dragons once attacked Berk. I alone know of the stone that can control the dragons.

It is too late to change the past, but I will take what was given to me and I will make a brighter future for both dragons and Vikings. I know that I will never be absolved for killing that dragon all those years ago. I can only hope that now, the ghost of the Night Fury can finally be at peace.

End
file.